

Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy by [deardmvz](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst ish, Billy Hargrove Lives, Domestic Fluff, F slur, M/M, Period-Typical Homophobia, S3 alternative, Soft Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington Needs a Hug, and hes not possessed, billy gets his ass beat, billy joins the scoops troop, domestic pining, eleven does not like the camaro, grigori is possessed, im nice so no one but grigori dies, rip steves legs

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Summary:

Prettyboy, Loverboy. Same different.

Through a lot of listening to Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy by Queen, Billy finds himself relishing in the idea of a domestic life with the dude he's been a dick too.

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Author's Note:

- For [merlinthecowboy](#).

This is for Merlin, or @thinger-strang on tumblr! They gave me permission to write this, and god have I been excited. This was supposed to be a short, sweet fic but well.... now it's over 17k words hahah.

I hope I did this idea justice, and I made something nice out of it! Enjoy!

Also!! HUGE special thanks to @roseszain on tumblr for betaing this & editing all of my incorrect punctuation- you are a life saver <3

"I can dim the lights and sing you songs full of sad things

We can do the tango just for two

I can serenade and gently play on your heart strings

Be your Valentino just for you"

Steve & Billy have beaten the ever living shit out of each other once.

Or well it was more like Billy beat the ever living shit out of Steve - and Steve got in an okay-ish punch that the sadist giggled at but. Still.

They fought and beat each other up, till they went home feeling the throbs of pain in their faces and the hot stings of tearing each other apart in their knuckles. Steve felt it even more after monster hunting, and Billy finally got his turn to feel what he gave Steve when he went home to Neil. So it goes.

The fight was about Max - then Lucas got roped in, and then Steve butted in, attempting to oust the kids.

To make it a tango for two, one might say.

And as they bloodied each other - Billy grabbing up a plate and smashing it on Steve's head - Billy couldn't help but feel the dull ache of pain near his heart. He thought of being 9, watching his mom do the same thing to protect him. He was quite sure they were wearing pretty much the same outfits too - red shirt, blue jeans. Kinda Ironic.

He could only hope he was doing what his mother had done for him, but now him for Max, no matter how much she hated him.

Steve morphed into Neil Hargrove as the plate exploded on him, ceramic raining down as the brunette tumbled into the hardwood floor. Billy got on top of him & began to beat him with every ounce of rage he saved for his father.

Truly he didn't want to do this - he would've just left Max on her own, never came here if it wasn't for Neil. Pushing him up against a wall shelf, spitting *faggot* at him, and insisting he get Maxine back in the house.

But now here he was. Trying to save Max in some odd way he hadn't intended, trying to keep her safe with the only thing he knew how to do. He would crash a million plates on Steve Harrington, no matter how much he felt guilty for it, just to play the same role as his mother did for him. He didn't know why the fuck Max & some boys were out with an 18 year old, in some freaky ass house at half past 9, and he didn't want to think about it too hard.

So he punched Steve again.

And again.

And again.

And again, until something stuck him in the neck, and the world went fuzzy, Max threatening what sounded like gibberish mixed in with "don't come near any of us again" to him, a nail bat above her shoulder. It gave him puppy dog eyes as his balls were close to be mashed in, the bat swinging down right between his thighs.

He went with it, agreeing to not go near them again - and then the

kids were taking off with his car and Steve.

He walked home that night, a Buick Skylark passing playing some stupid song by another fag named Freddie Mercury. Freddie was just more confident than Billy, singing overtly queer songs with his famous band. Giving his middle fingers to the world.

Billy was left to give only a sloppy walk of shame home, to where he'd get his ass fully beat. There would be no mom or older sibling to save him, or luckily placed plate.

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Billy was home alone, four months later. Max, Susan, and Neil had gone out to get groceries and lunch, leaving Billy to clean.

He didn't mind. It meant he got 'me time', where he could finally walk around the house and play his music, not needing to walk on eggshells so he could attempt to silently exempt himself from Neil's wrath.

He turned on the kitchen radio that Neil never used but had insisted on buying, and went to putting away the porcelain dinner plates and glass cups.

Freddie Mercury came on.

“Ooh, love, ooh, loverboy

What're you doin' tonight, hey, boy?

Set my alarm, turn on my charm

That's because I'm a good old-fashioned loverboy”

The song kind of reminded him of Steve.

Pretty boy. Loverboy. Whatever - they sounded the same to him.

He missed calling Steve "Pretty Boy" actually, ever since the nail bat incident.

He found himself staring longingly, watching Steve as he sucked on the filter of his cigarette against the beamer, smoke traveling down to his lungs. Billy had to tear himself away from watching Steve half of the time.

Harrington was *still* not dating Wheeler, and was *still* playing babysitter for the small herd of 'incoming freshmen'. He'd gotten a summer job, Billy laughing his ass off seeing Steve on local TV in that stupid sailor costume. It was fucking hilarious, with the awkwardness of it & the way he looked so uncomfortable to even be there. He looked ready to go smash a plate on himself honestly.

But besides the Scoops Ahoy shenanigans and other new things, Max's friend "El" was around more. Billy kind of liked her - she was quiet, didn't talk much or scream 24/7 with Max, which he knew other little girls did with their friends. Neil asked why she didn't talk much or why she didn't fully form her sentences when she left with the Sheriff - Max said that was just El. Neil mumbled something under his breath about El being 'slow' when Maxine left the dinner table to go back to her room.

Max had never really had friends before, so he expected the worst, but El pleasantly surprised him. She seemed decently calm, and like Max, obsessed with boys and dating. Billy was semi thankful for it, preferring that over the latter. Boy drama was better than screaming and talking non stop - and he could even get it, thinking back to his California 'boyfriend' flings.

They of course would not ever know about that though. But Billy in his head would silently get their frustrations, their love conquests not entirely stupid and foolish to him.

He closed his eyes, drowning in something better than the thought of annoying kids or the girls' boy drama or the dishes he was putting away. Freddie Mercury filled his senses as he began to sing along a little, fantasizing about who the rockstar must've been singing about.

"Ooh, let me feel your heartbeat (Grow faster, faster)

Ooh, ooh, can you feel my love heat?

Come on and sit on my hot-seat of love

And tell me how do you feel right after all”

At first, he figured he would picture one of his ex boyfriends as the 'loverboy'. The tall dark and handsome one had been his favorite, with his prize winning smile (even if his personality was shit near the end).

But as his mind wandered and he sang, he found himself drifting to Steve Harrington. It had to be because of the pretty boy nickname, Billy told himself.

Stupid hair, stupid face, stupid pretty-lover boy. He cussed under his breath but didn't stop the day dreaming, not wanting to let go of stupid pretty-lover boy yet.

He saw the other's mouth, the familiar cigarette wrapped up in his lips. It began to shift, becoming Billy's hand that firmly cupped around that clean shaven chin.

And then Billy's hand was pulling Steve's face downwards, and he was kissing him.

Billy jumped at that one, dropping the dish in his hand. One of Susan's glasses, a pony engraved on it. It tumbled to the floor, shattering on impact.

"Fuck!" He yelped, skittering as he dodged glass shards.

"Fucking hell - stupid bitch..." He muttered, going to find the broom and dust pan. He kept thinking about the kiss though, wondering what the hell it meant.

There was no way in hell that he was in love with Harrington.

Two weeks later, after swearing that this was impossible - he decided

he was definitely, hopelessly, in love with Steve Harrington. Fuck.

He found himself listening to Queen again while sitting in the arcade lot, waiting for Maxine, wanting to die inside as he fantasized about Steve. The brunette sat across the pavement on his beamer, and as per usual, he had his lips firmly suckling a cigarette.

The song was playing again, this time on his walkman, headphones on as he reclined in the driver's seat.

The song started and he closed his eyes, thinking again of everything he wanted.

First Billy was thinking of gross, filthy shit. Like pinning Steve to a mattress or shoving him in the backseat of the camaro. Unbuckling his pants, being rough and teasing like it was basketball.

But then it became softer, more gentle, as Billy let himself indulge in his dreams.

Spoon feeding Steve when he was sick, wrapping Steve up in his bedspread's fluffy, plaid comforter (he only knew this from overhearing Max complain that his entire room was blue plaid) so he would be warm. Stroking his hair as they watched TV, sharing his shirts and smacking each other with pillows.

Then the stupid, utterly domestically simple shit came.

Wanting to go to the grocery store, hold hands in the empty aisle for a moment.

Letting Steve have his toothbrush, swatting at him when he took it over.

Giving the other his boots to go get the mail, or pushing his aviators up onto the bridge of Steve's nose. Chuckling a gentle "Wear them so you can see where you're driving, dummy."

Buying him birthday cards, flowers for anniversaries that Billy marked down in a pocket notebook that he made sure not to forget.

Getting Steve gum or candy at the gas station, using what little money he had to try to spoil him.

Going on a million and one dates, to stupidly cheesy little places sometimes and the most romantic, private ones in others. Sitting up

on a cliff Billy had found, sharing cigarettes and lazily making out, pointing out each star constellation with the green glass tip of their beer bottles, before laying down and cuddling up.

If he'd had more money, he'd buy Steve tickets to the Fort Wayne Zoo & pay for the gas money to drive there. He'd take him out to that 'Enzo's' place, let him eat all he wanted while they playfully kicked each other under the table, surrounded by people in formal wear. He wasn't that fancy, or really educated enough to know what was 'classy'. But to him, growing up in a California trailer park, going into a house where the water didn't reek of sulfur and the walls weren't peeling? That was fancy.

Fort Wayne, in Billy's brain, was the San Diego Zoo (which he wanted to go to, but they could never afford it) and Enzo's was a 5 star french restaurant that Julia Child was running. Stuff like that was gold to Billy Hargrove, who'd only ever gotten to touch cheap plastic.

He found himself dreaming of a domestic life, where he spoiled Harrington to death. It was all he could have ever wanted, no matter how embarrassing it was. His eyes opened as the song ended, the Queen's Greatest Hits tape switched to Seven Seas of Rhye. He knew the order by heart now, listening to it in bed, awaiting Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy, counting down the tracks & rewinding to count them again and again to the song.

He sighed, opening his eyes to watch Steve ground out his cigarette on the asphalt with his sneaker heel and opened the car doors, his brats coming bounding out. Billy'd never get his dreams, but he could comfort himself with them for now.

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It's one week after sitting in the arcade parking lot, wanting to die as

he listened to Queen, when he's 'woken up' at 3 in the morning by none other than Steve Harrington at his window, knocking on the glass.

Or well - Billy wasn't woken up. He wasn't even truly asleep, actually.

You see, Billy'd gotten into another fight with Neil and now had the walkman wrapped up around him, headphones in, clothes and boots still on while in bed. He'd been debating on sneaking out, maybe going on a drive, but he had the covers pulled up around himself in case he felt too tired, or Neil came to check on him. He didn't want to face the wrath of staying up past Neil's curfew. So he was 'asleep', and Steve was 'waking him up'.

He took off his headphones, sitting up as Queen quietly continued to play while he stared back at Steve in confusion. The guy got another black eye, and his face looked fucked. For a moment, Billy thought Harrington might be high as fuck on drugs and got beat up.

" Let me, my coworker, and these kids in or I will break this window, Hargrove." The guy hissed, black eye glaring.

Billy debated it for a moment.

Why the utter fuck was Steve Harrington, guy he gave a black eye and a shattered nose to, at his window looking like he got the shit beat out of him again.

And he's got *others with him* too.

So it's not just Steve - which disappointed Billy a little, knowing Steve probably wasn't coming bounding into his arms to profess his love.

Someone else, who he was already guessing was Maxine, dragged him here. And now he wanted in.

Billy, for once in his life, complied with no outright questions or conditions. Although, it's not like he'd get much of a choice anyways - Steve was already holding a rock and curling his arm back.

As the last of the kiddies, *including Max*, came bounding in, there was a rip roar of a motorcycle down Cherry Lane. Neil cursed across the house at it, Steve hunkering himself down to the floor, holding a

peculiar looking little girl to his chest. The more Billy looked, he realized it was Max's friend El, who had blood gushing down from her nose, trailing down her neck onto the collar of her shirt. There was another girl, around Steve and his age, who looked familiar. He was pretty sure they have AP English together.

"Holy fuck." Steve breathed out, eyes wide. His hair was frazzled, and El's looked even worse. Her legs were a bloody mess, red mixing with black inky looking spots on her socks that looked like an exploded fountain pen.

"My dad's awake," Billy started, tone hushed, "You better have a good fucking reason for whatever this is." He eyed Maxine, eyebrows furrowed. Fucking bitch snuck out again - and now she was bringing her friends and big stupid Steve Harrington into their house, specifically *his* room, like this wasn't a deathwish.

The kids looked terrified - besides El & Maxine, there was Max's brat boyfriend, Lucas. Billy looked at him for a second before eyeing Max, hissing a quiet "*Are you fucking brain dead? Get him out of here before Neil sees -*"

"I can't! *H-He'll* get us!" And then she started crying, Lucas hugging her up. A curly haired kid, the younger Byers & Wheeler kids, a pigtailed kid who looks to be the little sister of Lucas, and the girl from his English class, all glared at him like he was an asshole.

Billy'd already had a rough day and he was too tired for this shit. So he ran his hands down his face, groaning a little before starting over. "It's for your safety - now what the *fuck* is going on ? *Who is this 'he'??* "

Harrington explained it, looking out the window nervously.

Billy was rapidly filled in on how the Byer's kid got possessed a few years back, that there was a '2nd dimension' of some sort. How the little girl clutched to Steve's chest had superpowers from lab experimentation, how there was some monster creature called a demogorgon, and it's got these things called demodogs that infested

the town last year. The weird drawings in the Byer's house were the underground tunnels, where said dogs lived, and that was why the kids were in the house with him 6 months ago. How since 1983, all their lives had been turned upside down by a *literal* Upside Down.

Then he got to this week.

Apparently the town was crawling with Russians, who had some sort of a base underneath the mall and were interested in the Upside Down. The "Mindflayer" as they called it, a beast from the Upside Down, had possessed one of the Russian soldiers. Grigori - or the "he" that just rode past on the motorcycle. Grigori's possessed self was tasked with making some sort of army for the creature to take over their world - and that's why half of the town was missing. They were being melted into meat goop to build the physical 1 body of this interdimensional being. And with that army, they wanted to kill off their one threat. The girl with superpowers - Eleven, as Steve referred to her, instead of El as Billy knew her. He thought El was short for Eleanor, not fucking '11'. A name which was also apparently her experiment number, that was *branded. on. her. wrist.*

But hey! Maybe it's all an elaborate joke! Maybe it's fake or it's just really good grease paint!

Steve continued on to tell about how a few hours ago he and Robin, the English class girl, as well as Erica and Dustin went to figure out what the base was. How they got caught after Steve kicked a Russian's ass (yeah, *sure*) in a control room but the guy snuck out and alerted the others, but Sinclair's sister and mophead escaped. How right before they almost got drugged the two kids came back, saved them.

But then Grigori came.

They outran him with a 'Russian golf cart', and made their way back to the surface where the others had all thankfully been waiting with Steve's bimmer after Mini Sinclair and Curls alerted them all to come. The adults, Mrs. Byers, The Sheriff, and apparently two others, were also on their way.

But to their dismay, before the adults could join in - Grigori followed them up to the surface. And now they were on the run from him, and hiding here. Trying to keep Eleven or "El" away from Grigori because

of her superpowers.

To be fair - everything he rambled out sounded fucking insane and like a croc of shit.

“El’s hurt, and we need to get to the Mall to shut the gate without Grigori taking El to the Mindflayer - and then when the gate closes, it should un-possess him, and it’ll kill the Mindflayers’ flesh body.”

Billy paused his music that he’d forgotten up until now was playing, eyes narrowing as he looked Steve dead on.

“All of the shit you told me - How do I know you’re not all on some mass hallucination drug, or planning to kill me. Or just making up some elaborate joke - like, why would you come to *me*? ”

“ *Look Meathead-*” Mini Sinclair started. She stopped though, cut off by Eleven extending her hand upwards. Billy’s eyebrows creased as he looked in the direction her splayed fingers were pointing.

Behind him, his cassettes began to rise, going airborne. His eyes went wide as he watched Metallica, Skid Row, and Slayer rotate in the air like they were on an invisible carousel before they fell on top of his bed, silent. Billy’s breath caught in his throat as he turned back at the little girl who was sporting the start of another nosebleed.

“Believe us now?” Robin asked, eyebrows raised. He nodded timidly.

“Shit...” Billy breathed out, a shaky huff coming off his lips. He looked at El who was pawing at her nose, with pain and fear still in her eyes. They somehow weren’t lying about this shit, as batshit crazy as it all sounded. And he hated to play into it but - he believed it. What they were saying seemed to be true, especially considering this kid just levitated his cassette’s.

This was an end of the world type of thing - and Billy had been clueless to it for months. Steve and the kids in the Byers house were now able to be pieced together, all of Max’s running off, all of the hushed secrets and the entire town’s odd feeling - it all came together in his head, like a puzzle receiving its missing piece.

This was huge, like a whole other evil thing underneath the entire town huge. It spread out for miles, with its tunnels full of secrets that

this small group had been navigating for years.

“Alright - What do you need?”

“We need your car.” Robin started, gesturing outside. “It’s the fastest thing we have right now against that motorcycle. We’d use Steve’s car but -”

“- Captain Russia kind of knows what it looks like.” He let out a sheepish smile that made Billy’s heart melt. All of those soft, domestic thoughts surged up, wrapping him in a quilt of fuzzy feelings. Steve was smiling at him. And even in the near end of the world, it was so comforting that he melted into a puddle of soft feelings inside.

“Of course.” He spat out, a little shocked himself at how fast he went with it. Steve and Robin seemed surprised too, but pleasant about it. Max looked at him weird but he quickly regained his composure and shot a glare at her, standing up and grabbing his jacket. He shrugged it on with ease.

“Ready to go?” Billy adjusted the headphones on his neck, sliding the Walkman into one of his coat pockets.

“Hey!-” Curlyhead, or Dustin, butted in. “We have a problem. Not all of us fit in that shitbox. Last time we barely got me, Max, Lucas, and Mike in there with Steve.”

Max chimed in before anyone else could speak. “We can take Neil’s truck - Robin you can drive right?” Billy gave her wide eyes, opening his mouth to tell her no, find another way.

“We’ll just say I stole it and you went off after me.” She added.

His jaw closed, clenching. He didn’t like that idea... but it was the best they had. What other way would they do it? El looked up at him from Steve’s arms with hope.

“Fine. I can...get the keys.” He grumbled. “You guys wait outside.” He tossed the camaro keys to Steve, telling him “Put her in the backseat, I’ll be out in a minute”.

Billy left no room for argument or second opinions before he silently slipped out of the room, head poking into the hallway and going forward.

He absolutely did not want to get Neil's keys. He'd tried it before, when his mom had left and he was desperate to find her - When Neil caught him, it was the beating of his life. He was scared shitless for weeks, feeling like he was on edge at every moment Neil came within a mile of him. And yet here little oblivious Maxine was, offering him up for the job. He could feel his feet wobbling like they were made of jello as he dared to raise a foot to move onwards.

'It's for Harrington - if you want a shot in hell of that stupid fluffy pansy bullshit and maybe living through the end of the world, you have to get those keys.' He thought. He knew he wouldn't get it anyway but - the idea of a false possibility gave him enough motivation.

Neil snored across the house, Billy bristling at it while the toe of his boot hit the living room floor. He stayed close to the walls to avoid the creaking floors, stepping strategically as he crossed over the area rug and into the kitchen. He made it to the silver carabiner with 6 tense steps, the truck key and its companions laid out on the counter like a shining moonlit beacon.

The motorcycle suddenly roared again up the street, motor loud as ever.

Billy jumped out of surprise, snatching the keys on instinct. Every nerve in his body tensed as they jingled.

"FUCKING SHUT UP!" Neil shouted, Billy freezing in place. Fuck fuck fuck.

The sound of rustling bedsheets came, Neil probably coming to go yell at Grigori. From what had been described to Billy - yeah, good luck standing up to him dad.

His mind flew off Neil and to a more pressing concern though - the kids were outside, and the Evil Russian was probably heading right back this way.

Shit.

Well, fuck being silent then.

Billy ran with the keys in his hands like a bat out of hell.

His footfalls were like an elephant's as he barreled out of the kitchen,

back across the carpet and through the front door, Neil shouting something he didn't stick around long enough to understand. He flung the door open, shoving it shut and throwing the truck keys at Robin. She snatched them, taking off towards the truck where the other kids waited, anxiously and rapidly pulling at the doors.

Thinking fast, the blonde grabbed a heavy rock from the side of the porch and pushed it up against the bottom of the door. Neil would have to get the rock to budge, and it would buy them a few seconds of time.

The man was screaming through the house now, yelling "WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU WILLIAM?!". William ignored him.

Billy sprinted towards his car where Steve sat passenger, El in the back with her seatbelt already fastened. Behind them the yellow house door buckled while Billy slid into the camaro's bucket seat, Neil trying to push his way out. Across from them, the truck started and the kids clambered in.

Billy hand flew to the ignition, key messily shoving into the lock. His hand hovered for a moment though, head foolishly snapping back over his shoulder to look at the shaking house door.

He hoped Neil wouldn't murder him (or Max) when they got home.

The motorcycle revved again, and the sound started to elongate into a hum, coming closer.

"THERE'S NO TIME! *DRIVE HARGROVE!*!" Steve yelled, a hand startling him as it came to rapidly shake his shoulder. He snapped out of his focused daze quickly and did as told, the camaro roaring alive underneath them.

Something clattered behind the group, the kids in the truck screaming. El and Steve joined them, mouths open in horror. Billy made no motion to look - he promptly slammed his foot into the gas pedal of the camaro. The blue car lurched hard, tires spinning to propel them down the asphalt as the tail end dragged at the sudden movements. Billy wheeled tightly around the corner of the drive, back end practically drifting outwards, before straightening out onto the road.

"HANG ON!"

Steve and El only responded in terrified screeches.

The camaro rocketed forward, rubber squealing. The truck was pulling out directly after them, yelling coming from Neil and the motorcycle growing louder behind them. Billy paid it no attention, hands focused on the road and gripping the wheel as the deep blue missile began to pick up speed, trying to get out in front of the motorcycle.

He kept his foot on the gas, the truck and motorcycle getting quieter the more he pushed down on it, the motor drowning the ruckus outside.

The thrumming engine didn't help the yelling inside the car though - the camaro's headlights flickering on as the car tore down the street, poor El in the back screaming. She clearly was not happy about the speed, but they had no choice. Steve was screaming too, grabbing at the door handle and his seatbelt.

Billy didn't slow down for a second.

"I'd like for you and I to go romancing

Say the word, your wish is my command"

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The blonde drove faster and faster into the night, hoping and praying to god that the motorcycle wouldn't catch up. The speed was still well over normal but evening out now, the passengers adjusting to it as long as Billy didn't violently flip or spin the car around a corner or dead end.

The headlights or sound of the motorcycle were nowhere to be found so far, seemingly left behind them at the house on Cherry Lane.

Steve was currently taking up new communications duties, holding a walkie talkie that corresponded to one in the truck. El had quieted for the time being, but was still white knuckle gripping the leather of the backseat. He attempted to offer her the walkman for peace but she

was not interested (or wanting to let go of the seat gripped in her nails).

“Seabird to Scoops Troop - Any sign of the fried? Over.”

Seabird was the choice codename for El, Billy, and Steve. The Californian found it kind of funny, wondering if it was because of him constantly calling Max “shitbird” (his word for seagull. She never shut up & yapped constantly like one).

And then fried of course meant flayed.

The truck was a few miles behind them after dropping Erica and Dustin off on a hill, keeping watch from a distance after they had decided Grigori was not following them. He must’ve made a detour, not coming down the full way back over to the Hargrove home. Both cars seemingly had missed the possessed man, escaping without him coming to investigate or catch sight of them.

“Scoops Troop to Seabird. No sign of the fried - will keep a lookout and radio if we see him. How is Asshole & Wonder Woman?” Lucas’ voice crackled back over the radio.

El apparently loved Wonder Woman - Billy made it a point in his head that later if they didn’t all die, he’d get her some comics as an apology for his erratic driving. The name ‘Asshole’ for him was out of pocket though.

“Asshole is driving, *still* , trying to get to the destination *quickly* -” Billy hissed, looking down for a moment at his dashboard. They were going almost 70 mph, the speed limit maybe 35 at most. Yeah, that was dangerous. But as his eyes slid across the board, observing the tachometer, the odometer, and the speedometer, he set his gaze on something that worried him more than the fact he was going 40 over the speed limit.

“Uh....” He started, eyes glancing up at the road then looking back down to stare at it.

“What?” Steve asked, a sincere concern in his voice.

Billy pointed for Steve, right at the fuel gauge - its own little ‘fingers’

pointing towards E on it's scale.

Empty.

“We uh... we’re almost outta gas.” Billy whined, letting off the gas. The camaro was fast, but it was a sprinter - not a distance runner. And with the fact that the last time he got gas was on Monday? With all the sneaking out he’d done since then, going towns over and coming back, no wonder the gas vanished so fast.

“Fuck... Scoops Troop, we need to make a pitstop. The car’s low on gas.” Steve cursed into the walkie.

Lucas tried to argue on the other side, Mike adding in some dumbass thing about El pushing the car with her powers.

“Absolutely not.” Billy spat, yanking the walkie talkie out of Steve’s hands. He yelped but gave it over with ease. Billy’s hand pressed on the button to speak. “This piece of shit weighs 3433 lbs on a good day. No fucking way. We’ll get gas - it’ll take two seconds. In and out. Over.” He took his finger off the button, slapping the walkie back into Steve’s chest.

Fuckin’ Wheeler kid.

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Billy found them a Shell station just as the car began to make abnormal sounds, sighing in relief when he pulled into the dimly lit place. It was completely deserted, besides a lonely looking attendant at the register. Billy handed Steve the keys, telling him “If Grigori comes & I’m not outside, drive off”.

He put a blanket he kept in the back over El, and walked inside.

“\$47.20 on Pump 3.” He requested, eyes low. The cashier nodded, taking Billy’s money and doing his thing.

Billy went back outside, watching the street to make sure no one was coming. He was ready to sprint back to the car if he had to, just to keep *him* , who he hadn't even seen yet, from getting El. All was luckily quiet, no motorcycle hum anywhere close. The only sounds were the peep frogs calling out to each other and an owl hooting in the distance. And, a familiar song playing.

A hushed, slightly staticy but still loud enough to hear, “*Ooh, love, ooh, loverboy*

What're you doin' tonight, hey, boy?

Write my letter

Feel much better

And use my fancy patter on the telephone”

Freddie Mercury, singing Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy over the gas stations speakers. Billy couldn't help but feel the need to sing on instinct, his fingers wrapping around the handle of the gas pump, putting it into the camaro while he hummed along to the song and the car began to refuel. The warmth of the summer night took over, a breath of electricity surrounding him in peacefulness.

“When I'm not with you

Think of you always

(I miss those long hot summer nights) I miss you”

“Is that Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy you're humming?”

Billy half jumped out of his skin at the broken tranquility, hand coming off the pump and cussing out a “*Fucking hell!*”. He hadn't even realized Steve had rolled down the window and was watching him from the passenger side door, listening to the muscular guy stupidly hum. Billy gave him the finger.

“Fuck off Harrington, it's the end of the world or whatever. I can hum Queen if I want.”

He felt his cheeks burn a little at all of the soft thoughts that were accompanying the song, and how they were coming to a boil in his brain's stew with Steve right there.

He could feel himself wanting to pull Steve out of the car and dance with him in the shitty gas station, spinning him around like they were a guy and a girl just out for a late summer's night romp on the town. He still hoped one day he'd get to do that, even if it was a silly fantasy.

“It’s a good song. Keep humming it, I’m joining in.”

And then without a second beat Steve was humming along to the song too, El silent in the backseat. Billy raised an eyebrow, wondering what to do as Steve was humming along with the music, fingers tapping on the leather of the doors paneling ledge.

Harrington paused though after a second, his smirk dropping into a frown. “What? You’re not gonna hum it anymore?” He asked, disappointment written all over his cheeks.

Billy didn’t like to see Steve look at him like that.

Not anymore.

“No, ‘m gonna sing it.”

And that he did.

He knew every word, swaying his hips a little as he sang the song like a lullaby to a poor innocent baby. Singing the song was half a joke and half a sweet release. He was completely derealized, too focused on the fact that there were apparently super powers and monsters to care that he was breaking every rule he’d set. Steve was his enemy, someone he was not to go near - but here he was, deciding to sing to him.

“When I’m not with you” He crooned, eye’s falling blissfully closed.

Then Steve joined in, his voice making Billy’s blue eyes go big in surprise. Steve’s singing was soft and sickly sweet, blending perfectly with the song.

“Think of me always.

Love you,” He drawled out, looking up at the other expectantly. His hooded eyelids beckoned.

“Love you...” Billy sang back quietly, a shy smile on his face. Steve grinned at that, starting to bop his head to the song as it continued on. Billy’s foot tapped along to the beat, feeling his own lips upturning in joy as Steve kept singing with him. They sang the stupidly sweet song to each other, turning it into a duet where they harmonized at points and then one dropped off with a little hand signal to let the other know it was their solo. The thought of Grigori slipped away as they performed, hearts beating fast as they belted out the words. El was even curiously peeking out of the blankets, laughing at the two of them as they got into it, the gas pump continuing to pour in juice for the car. Billy debated on just pulling it out to make it a mic, even if it meant a spraying faceful of gas. It would’ve probably been pretty epic, and worth it to see Steve’s reaction to his little rockstar move.

They kept on singing as the gas kept pumping. Mentally, Billy was adding karaoke to his list of stupid domestic shit to do with Harrington in his little personal fantasy.

Eventually the pump buckled though, signalling it was done. Billy debated on seeing if he could pay for more gas just to keep singing with Harrington.

“Well, aren’t you gonna pull it out?”

The words made Billy jump in his own skin, going red at the quick second thought innuendo that came to mind.

Those words were going on his mental list too - just on a different side of it, where he catalogued stuff like when Steve said ‘Yeah it’s me, dont cream your pants’.

That side he was embarrassed of.

“Y-yeah, right.” He gulped, taking the pump out and putting it back, slapping the gas cap back on and flipping the lid shut.

“So - Starcourt?”

“Yup.” Steve popped his P, nodding.

Starcourt it is - to close the gate with *fucking Mrs. Byers AND The Sheriff. And a gaggle of Max and her kid friends, plus an older girl.*

And a superpowered 13 year old.

And one, big haired, stupid, pretty lover boy, Steve Harrington.

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The ride was peaceful out of the station, the group going down the backroads at a slower speed so El could have a moment to recuperate. She wasn't used to a car having such a loud motor, or the way the engine and tires screamed when it went fast, or the harshness of it all. It was like a miniature roller coaster where there was less ensured safety.

"Feeling a bit better now?" Billy asked, angling down his mirror to look at her. El nodded, hugging at her bloody leg.

"What's that from?" His eyebrow raised. The radio in the car was silent, her still not wanting his walkman. It was only their voices and the cars humming for noise.

"Mindflayer. Piece in leg... had to take it out." She said quietly.

"It's like a leech - if she didn't take it out it could've killed her." Steve interjected as Billy opened his mouth. Shit.

"Leech?" El asked.

"Yeah. The little blood sucking things you get at the lake, 'look like a slug? Will got them last year?' She figured it out, nodding as he went back to explaining to Billy. "I think it's like... putting them in people. Like a uh..."

Steve drifted off, snapping his fingers trying to get the word.

"Parasite?" Billy questioningly filled in.

"Yeah! Like a parasite. Robin says it's like if you get it, it can take over. Overrun your entire body - that's what happened to Will last

time, and now Grigori. And I guess all of the townspeople who've been getting flayed and helping flay others. The leeches are like little worker bees for the big mama queen bee. Its a.....”

“Hivemind.” El finished. She beamed proud, happy that she remembered that word.

“Thank you. A hivemind.” Steve’s hand gestured out, El smiling a little at him.

“Huh.. This feels like some Alien bullshit.”

“Alien.” El said, repeating Billy’s words.

“Yeah, like the movie. It’s uh - it’s not for kids.” Billy added, frowning a little. “But the creatures in the movie work kinda like that. They’re just more gross and this is well, real.”

She nodded at that, going silent as she thought in her head about all of this information. Billy and Steve were left to talk.

“So, what’s the plan for when we get there?”

“Hopper and Joyce plus a friend of theirs are making their way into the base as we speak - Robin’s dropping Dustin and Erica to go up to the top of Hawkins Hill.” Billy recognized that as the huge hill Max asked to sled down, the one that you could see the entire town from. “Dustin’s got a fancy radio he built at science camp up there, and the two of them are on duty to watch the Mindflayer & communicate back.

For now, we’re on protecting El from Grigori duty. Robin and the kids, plus Nancy & Jonathan are going to be at the mall with us to join in on hiding El. Then after the gate’s closed, we help Joyce, Hopper, and Hopper’s friend out of the base after.”

Billy catalogued it all into his mind, trying to stay on track.

Him & Steve: Operation Protect Eleven 1

Max, Lucas, Will, Mike, & Robin... and Nancy Wheeler + Big Byers too: Operation Protect Eleven 2

Dustin & Erica: Communicate and watch for the Flayer.

Joyce & Hopper, with the help of some other guy: Close the gate

El: Just please, for the love of god, stay away from the Mindflayer & Grigori

And then the other side, which was Grigori & The Mindflayer: Take El, destroy the world.

The Walkman around his neck was a silent comfort as he drove, trying not to think too hard about every little detail and possible flaw. How the fuck were they going to deal with getting the adults out of the base with all of the Russian military down there? What if the Mindflayer didn't die when they closed this gate? What if Grigori got El, what if someone got seriously hurt, what if the gate didn't even close? There were so many ways to go wrong with this. So many.

He hoped that if it came down to it, Queen would provide a decent soundtrack to die to.

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The rest of the ride was peaceful, Steve filling Billy in even more on the Byer's house incident. Any previous tension between the two had seemed to ease up, slipping down to a barely detectable level. A possible Armageddon really could bring people together.

“So these little shits are trying to go *INTO* the tunnels by themselves, child guns ablazing, barely any plans - and I’m over there shaking the dish towel at them telling them no - and then oh shit! Here you come!”

Billy laughed, eyes crinkling up. Knowing all of this Upside Down stuff now? God it made everything make so much more sense. No more missing pieces and unknown reasons - the other dimension put it all together like a shitty glue that binds a scrapbook of odd

occurrences together.

“God Harrington, I had a really strict curfew to pick Maxine up by and she went missing. I had to cancel my date to go find her. And you’re all creepy over there, lying and then Max is RIGHT THERE in the window. I mean you were practically screaming for me to beat your ass!”

Billy had also given up on most of the secrecy he’d tried to stick to. The world had an interdimensional beast trying to plant parasites in people to kill the little girl that sat in the backseat of the camaro - him and Harrington really weren’t getting the chance to be enemies anymore. They stuck together so he might as well be honest, only keeping a few things left to himself.

“How long was she there for?!”

“Like the entire time! It was so bad, the fucking confidence you had trying to lie and say she wasn’t there and her little brat ass is staring at me like I’m Bigfoot through the window.”

“Oh my god.” Steve groaned, his hands coming up to smooth over his face, tugging at it. “So I was making an idiot of myself?”

“That’s an understatement. You were a fucking circus clown and the entire rest of the carnival. I was pissed cause she goes missing, I get yelled at, I have to go drive around and find her, and now I’m finding her with *YOU* and the kid I told her she shouldn’t go near.” He drew in a breath. “I love her but god she is stupid.” His hands gestured out.

“Wait so why did you go after Lucas then - Is that something to do with the Neil guy? That’s your guy’s dad, right?”

“Huh?” He raised a brow, trying to figure out the words to explain. “He’s our dad, yeah. He’s uh...” He tasted his words carefully before he spat them out.

“He’s not the type of person who would be okay with that. It’s not safe for Maxine to date Lucas - or for Lucas to be near her so blatantly. After she moves out? Shit I don’t give a fuck. But now? Nah.” He exhaled, a sigh falling out of him.

“I figured they’d be smart enough to figure it out, but if she wasn’t going to do it then I was going to do it.”

“Ohhhh...” Steve drew out, thinking for a moment. The cog’s must’ve been turning in his head, getting the message. Interracial marriage had only been legalized ‘67 - so their relationship was still easily viewed as wrong by the local old cunts and their kids. “We really should have talked more. This makes a lot more sense - I didn’t think anyone could be such an ass to do that.”

“Yeah no - I’m an asshole, but I’m not that evil.”

El pushed up in her seat, legs swinging a little. “I don’t think you’re an ass - hole.”

Billy sighed, looking back in his mirror at her, her curse oddly endearing. He smiled.

“Thanks El.”

He looked over at Steve, expecting a playful “ *Haha yeah, you’re not an ass, even if you did beat me up and harass me.*”

Steve said nothing though, just watched the two of them for a moment before going back to looking out the front window. Billy’s stomach sank a little.

Maybe he wasn’t as over their quarrels as Billy thought he was.

“Turn right - The employee’s mall entrance is right up here. I’m gonna take El through the back doors, just in case.”

Billy did as told - he turned right, Steve directing him to pull up to a grey door next to a dumpster. Keys jingled as he got out, pushing the seat down to help El, the blanket they’d put over her now curled around her shoulders. He was looking towards a door that must’ve served as the exit to the outside for trash or smoke breaks.

“You go park the car, come in through the main entrance. We’ll be in the Scoops backroom with the walkie.”

Billy nodded, hesitant to leave the two. He wanted to come as well, not miss a moment next to Steve. But the guy was already picking up El, her getting into his arms as he was unlocking the door with his key ring.

He pulled the camaro away, readjusting his mirror to look behind

him instead of into the seat. His eyes glanced for a moment into the mirror, watching the door shut before he looked back up at the parking lot and headed around the building.

The place was deserted practically, the sides of the brick and concrete building barely illuminated by the cheap bulbs as he came around to the front.

A singular blinding light suddenly lit it all up though, the neon Starcourt Mall sign buzzing above. It burned brighter than any Mall light, staring the building down.

A motorcycle's spotlight clicked on and shone right on a familiar truck that was parked in front of the mall's entrance. The engine of the bike revved, Billy's eyes flickering to look back at *Neil's* truck, Robin hurrying the kids out towards the mall doors. Nancy Wheeler, pistol in hand, stood at the driver's door and pointed her weapon right at the biker. Billy looked over to him.

He was grizzled, built out of stone like a statue. He wore no helmet, just a torn up jacket. His neck stuck out, Billy spying a weird blackness to it, like he'd gotten hit by a bucket of ink on the side of his face.

Grigori. It had to be.

Nancy was fierce and tense, not budging from the truck and its blockade of the door as she pointed the barrel down at the man.

'Come closer and I'll shoot.' She silently dared.

Grigori just twitched and smiled.

And then the motorcycle was launching forward.

Gunshots rang out and Billy felt his entire world starting to go in slow motion, foot leaving the brake and hitting the gas. He wasn't even sure what he was doing, letting primal thought and adrenaline take over as the car shot out.

The camaro picked up fast, darting out from the building and

rocketing right for the bike, front bumper like another bullet towards the Russian. Shots continued to ring out, Billy hearing one hit something close. A shattering sound almost, him unfocused on it. He pressed the gas harder and swerved towards the speeding bike.

A metallic crunch.

A scream.

A bike engine that cut out like it'd been silenced.

Grigori was at the front of the car on the motorcycle and then suddenly rolling over the hood, hitting the windshield with a thud that caused the glass to crack and buckle in, pieces 'shattering' in a large chunk (Billy knew they made them like that in case drivers hit wildlife - so the animal wouldn't come through the barrier and kill the driver).

The meaty man kept going, falling off the side of the car with a crashing thud. His bike stayed attached with the car's fender as it dragged it along, Billy's foot falling off the gas and to the brakes. Nancy was getting more and more visible in the windshield, becoming *too* close, and his hands found themselves gripping the wheel as he applied as much brake as possible.

The car skidded, sliding forward on momentum only, speed tumbling down and down.

Billy sent a prayer up that if anyone was listening *please, don't kill Nancy Wheeler today, even if I said she should die so I could get Steve-* .

Someone must've heard, because the car skidded right to 4, maybe 3, feet in front of her, and stopped with a bounce.

Billy let out an exhale of relief.

Practically kicking the door open, Billy got out of his metal deathtrap and stood, calling to Wheeler across the now dented roof.

"Go in! I'll handle him."

Nancy's wide eyes stared at the car, then Billy, then back at the kids. Robin yelled "Come on!", and Nancy hesitantly moved her feet to head inside. She took a few steps around the truck, turning back to him.

"Please be careful!" She called back as the kids rushed inside, her last

in line.

“I’ve got it!” He answered. She frowned at that, but slipped inside the mall.

A groan alerted Billy as his eyes flicked over his smashed car, a gunshot wound or two in the back and passenger window (probably from when he was down range of Nancy’s gun), and to the biker, splayed out a few feet away.

Shit.

Still alive. And moving.

Grigori’s arm wobbled as he stretched it out, pressing his palm into the ground. And then legs were dragging up, going into a crouching position. Slowly the crouch started to compact, the man spitting black, gooey looking blood on the ground as he began to stand.

Billy watched in horror as the Russian got up after getting hit head-on by a car, taking him in fully for the first time. The man was feet taller than him, a cropped buzz cut like Neil’s. His collar bones protruded out and he had rippling muscles that probably could have benched Billy like he was a feather.

The younger man shifted, feet walking him backwards to get behind the cars for protection from the other, moving closer to the mall’s entrance.

Fuck. This dude was jacked - and he had a demon creature in him. Billy had no clue how he was going to win, but damn was he going to try.

“Hey asshole, what the fuck is up?” He called, trying to keep his voice from shaking. It didn’t work, his fear imminent as the possessed other smirked at him and began to walk.

Fuck fuck fuck.

“What? Was my car to your bike not enough?” Billy tried again, forcing himself to plant his feet as he remembered he couldn’t let Grigori get into the mall. El was in there - he couldn’t get to El.

The Russian kept walking, staggering around the destroyed camaro and towards Billy, eyes glaring and mouth in a wicked smile.

He felt like he was watching the Byers’ house fight with Steve all over again, except this time he was Steve and Grigori was him,

walking up to push him down with ease and storming inside to grab Max, who would now be Eleven.

He hoped he would hold up better than Steve did, and at least maybe a syringe carrying Eleven would come to take Grigori down.

“You?” The Russian said, stopping a few feet from the blonde. His tone was dead flat despite the smile, like something was puppeteering his mouth from the inside furls of his stomach.

“M-me?” Billy pointed a quivering finger at himself as the bulky man inched closer. From this short distance he could see the detailed damage of the parasite. His eyes were bloodshot, barely any semblance of humanity in them. Black inky veins crawled up his neck and into his sideburns, snaking up around his arms and into his mouth that dripped out black goop.

Billy felt terror run down his spine as he looked at the tall Russian who he had stupidly thought he could take care of - not calculating that he could recover from the car so fast.

Neon idly buzzed above them.

“You.”

Grigori swung fast, Billy ducking on nerves. He’d practiced dodging punches after he witnessed Steve do it to escape one of his, leaving Billy jealous that he couldn’t react that fast to get out of the way.

Now he was only thankful that Steve dodged him so easily, because Grigori’s iron fist would have probably knocked him out cold if he hadn’t been already practicing.

Billy swung right back, hitting the other in the chest. The large brute made a grunt but barely swayed, swinging right back and connecting with Billy’s shoulder.

The punch fucking burned, the Russian built out of god knows what with knuckles that felt like getting a searing hot 70 lb weights dropped on you. The sting of it was like being branded, the blonde stumbling back, mouth open in a gasp of agony. Grigori came again, his left hand connecting with Billy’s nose.

No laughter came like with Steve, this time just a yelp of pain and the sting of tears. He was horrified by how hard this guy could swing and how calculated it was, even after getting run down by 3433 + lbs of car.

Billy *tried* to put on a brave face as he attempted to fight back, hands throwing blindly at the other. All he could think of now was the immeasurable pain in his face and arm, unlike any beating Neil or one of his schoolyard fighting mates gave him. This was new, and so much worse.

A few punches hit in random spots, but Billy proved to be nothing against the Russian, no matter how much he could bench or how strong he was against everyone else in this hick town. This Grigori guy was jacked on a literal monstrous entity that was possessing him to be leaking black, and so many steroids and other drugs Billy had probably never even seen or heard of before. He was a super soldier, basically.

18 year old Billy Hargrove, trying to fight off a Russian X-Man, and in a straight up bare knuckle to bare knuckle fight?

Billy wasn't ever going to get an outcome where he won, no matter how much he tried. The guy was the champion pitbull in a ring, and Billy was the bait dog. He could fight, but he would be nothing more than a tool to rile the other up.

He was fucked.

Grigori punched again, right into the shorter guy's face. Billy thought his eyeball popped out for a moment if he was honest - the pain seared through his brain enough to make him black out, crumbling to the ground like a bag of bricks.

“Pitiful” was the last thing he heard before the world went dark and silent.

When he awoke, it was starting to rain.

The sprinkling droplets coated his skin, one falling from the clouding sky and landing on his brow bone, dribbling down as he began to open his eyes.

He stopped halfway and let out a cry of pain.

“Fuck!”

Everything burned in his brain, shoulder feeling swollen, his nose

feeling like it'd been pulled forward and to the side, left to be a huge swelling, throbbing lump. His eye hurt even worse, the sting of it horrible enough to make him want to pass out again.

The sudden remembrance of the situation at hand, and the thought of Grigori, inside the mall, trying to get El, kept him awake.

With a few short gasps of distress Billy got himself standing, hand cupping his swollen eye with the cool silver of his ring providing tiny bits of relief.

His steps were shaky as he hobbled to the Mall's entrance and pushed open the Starcourt doors. Almost immediately, he was greeted by the chaos and destruction.

“ELEVEN!” Someone, sounding like Steve, screamed. Lights flickered, the new Mall looking *too* dark. It seemed ominous, the shouts of people coming from down the hallway.

Billy took his hand off his eye and began to walk, hobbling at first, then breaking into a faster pace. The shouts continued, the blonde following after them.

“GET OFF HER! LET HER FUCKING GO YOU PIECE OF SHIT!”

Steve. Definitely Steve.

Billy's heart pumped as he picked up his pace into a run, edging himself faster and faster, arms pumping, legs throbbing as he got through the entrance. Shops began to blur together, clothing and toy stores becoming one. The kiosks in the middle of the walkway aisle became obstacles that Billy dodged as he ran faster and faster, nose filling with that familiar scent of hot dogs and soft pretzels. His feet continued to carry him, whizzing past another kiosk before sliding into the edge of the food court.

His eyes stared up in terror as he saw the state of it.

The place looked a mess, chairs tipped over and tables strewn every which way. The bar counters of food places ransacked, utterly destroyed and covered in familiar black looking streaks, as if someone (Grigori) had been dripping blood onto them as he tore them apart.

Scoops was the worst though.

That blood was not only black but red, sprayed on the glass divider

piece of the ice cream counter. Black drips followed out of the store, red mixed in, and led up the stairs.

Billy's eyes followed, the source of the shouting coming into view.

The sight made him want to vomit.

Steve was indeed shouting and screaming, limping after Grigori, who was dragging a kicking and wailing Eleven across the second floor. Steve was on all fours, doing a death crawl of some sort. His legs looked bent all wrong, like they'd been broken or twisted out of place. They were already black and blue, the brunette's face somehow even more fucked up.

“STEVE!” Billy shouted, not even sure if the other heard him. “HANG ON!”

Billy ran faster, body beginning to yowl at him. It was giving in, starting to get woozy from the hard punch that was forming a black eye and the stress of everything happening. He hit the stairs to the second floor and felt himself getting lightheaded, praying that he would put out his arms if he fell forwards or backwards to avoid cracking his head open.

One step after another, they seared into his head like more punches. Quietly he began breathing out “1 step, 2 step, 3 step, 4 step, 5 step, 6 step-” and so on. It egged him on and on forever.

The rhythm of the words was the only thing keeping him a semblance of awake, feeling himself drifting off as he reached the top. Step 42, Step 43, Step 44, Step 45, Step 46, Step 47, Step 48.. Step 49... Step 50.... Step..51.....Step.....fifty.....two.....

The screams began to get quieter, replaced by a slow ringing, a song crackling through while his head turned to watch in reduced speed.

El's screaming still, flailing with neon lights in the background, becoming blurred and blobby. The figure of Steve, still on the floor, crawling with all of his might could be made out. Their screams and every other sound was becoming further and further off, blocked by ringing and an invisible wall, like he had on his walkman headphones that still hung around his neck. The song played as everything began to blink dark.

“ *When I'm not with you*

Think of you always

(I miss those long hot summer nights) I miss you"

Freddie Mercury sang in his head as he fell at the top of the stairs onto the second floor's cool tile. The world went black again.

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Billy awoke to feel Steve gripping him with an arm tucked under his armpit, tugging him across the floor through tears. He only knew it was Steve because of the strangled voice in his ear, pleading with him.

"Wake up. God, please wake up," He whined, Billy feeling a weak movement as he was feebly scraped across the floor like dead meat being hauled by an ant.

"Billy, Billy *please* wake up. I can't move you any further . "

Billy's non-punched eye began to flutter and open, blinking quick as the world came in bright, the yelling and screaming of something around them starting to filter in.

An explosion of fireworks overhead made him jump, eye clamping shut.

"Shit - what the fuck was that-" Steve hissed, Billy feeling himself get pulled closer. Feebly, he attempted to open his eyes again.

His head was angled downwards, facing into his jacket clad chest, so the first thing he saw was his own legs. Jeans that were now dirty and scrape filled, a bit of blood on them too. He had no clue where that came from.

Then they moved to the other's legs, still in the stupid sailor uniform.

Mangled, twisted out of place.

Steve's knee was pointed 30 degrees in the wrong way, his ankle pointed the opposite. Like someone had grabbed his leg in two spots and twisted, rotating them in different directions like they were a salt shaker.

A roar came from behind him, but he paid it no mind. The other leg was a mess as well, the entire thing turned inwards from below the knee. It was like when Billy got mad at Max as a kid, taking her bendable dolls and curling his fists around them, contorting them till the joints made that snapping sound to say he had gone too far. After, they'd hang loosely, no longer connected to any other piece. They were just weights then, just like Steve's limp legs. The socks made them look delicate, bunched up at his ankles like leg warmers.

Thick fingerprints were marked out down the mole dotted flesh in black and blue, yellow blooming from them.

Grigori. Had to be his fingers, with how big the prints were. The rest of Steve's legs looked like they were swelling and going paler than normal, knee caps purple and the one ankle bright red.

"Holy shit Steve..." He breathed out, eyes wide and horrified. He didn't want to move at all, too scared of brushing a leg and sending a bolt of agony into the other. He stayed still, head turning on an odd angle and tipping back. Steve gave him a sad smile, his face equally busted with a matching black eye and busted lip.

"He got El, Billy... He just came into Scoops, dragged her out of the backroom. I tried to kick him or something after he hit me, and," He gestured to his legs.

"He twisted them like a fucking branch man. And I guess he got you too.... Your nose."

Billy was almost thankful he couldn't see his nose, tilted into his black eyed that offered no current vision. He nodded, gaze going back down to the others legs.

"Your legs though-"

" *Shh* . They're fine." A firework boomed, the two recoiling down. Billy moved on from the other's legs, now worried about the racket overhead.

"The hell is that?" Billy asked, eyebrows tipped up in worry.

"I don't know. After he went down the stairs with El and you collapsed, I blacked out myself - can you bring us to the railing?" Billy nodded.

"Yeah, yeah of course."

Billy got up off Steve with a wobble, sitting up to where he could scoot out of the others legs, careful not to touch or brush up against them. He exited the others grip, turning over to crawl back around to take up Steve's position. He worried if he stood he'd fall over again, maybe actually crack his head open.

The burn in his lower arms as he grabbed under the other's elbows told him he had indeed splayed them out and caught himself before he fell at the top of the stairs, about 10 feet to their right. There was some blood over there too, Billy looking around. It was on his shirt as well.

"Nosebleed." Steve filled in, Billy nodding. Thank god it wasn't anything else.

He scooted to get behind Steve, this time wrapping his arm around him.

"Good?" He asked, checking on his positioning.

"Great."

"Alright here we go."

Billy heaved, pulling Steve. The boy shot out a cry of pain.

"*Fuck! Fuckkkkkkk-*" He whined, eyes rolling back. "*Shit shit shit, my leg fucking holy fuck-*"

Billy must have tugged too hard, Steve's legs dragging on the floor, the pressure and rubbing causing them to pull. Ouch.

"Shit I can-

"No just keep fucking tugging and get to the railing Billy, *holy shit* ." He spat, teeth gritting together and beginning to grind. Tears were pooling in his eyes again, clenched shut as they began to spill over and tumble down his cheeks.

"...Are you s-"

"*Just do it!!*"

So Billy did.

He grabbed the other up tighter and began to shuffle fast, pulling.

Steve babbled curses and cries out of his mouth, but urged him not to

stop moving. Billy frowned, moving his legs as quickly as he could, imagining the pain as Steve's sweaty calves stuck to the tile, forming a horrible suction-like bond. Steve just kept swearing it off, trying to get through the pain as his fingers reached up, nails coming around Billy's arm and digging in. He didn't make a single complaint, just kept dragging.

The horrible shuffling stopped after a moment, and Steve's cries subsided as he was laid against the railing, Billy scooting over to look too.

Holy fuck.

The Mindflayer.

They'd been so focused on each other they hadn't bothered to figure out what the distorted and booming screams behind them were, or why fireworks were going off. Hadn't bothered to look up and take in the giant hole in the glass ceiling, and black gooey blood dripping down from it.

Hadn't seen the beast that lingered on the floor below them, tentacle arms flailing as fireworks began to rain on it like hellfire. He followed where one came from only to see Lucas and Mike, launching it off. Another one came from a different side.

Billy's eyes watched in alarm as he took in the reality of the creature they all had feared, that he could have believed was made up an hour ago.

This was somehow worse than the Alien Queen he'd been picturing, this spider looking thing made out of apparent human flesh, with pulsating limbs and a hooded head that spiraled into rows of teeth.

"Steve - walkie the kids, *whatthefuck* -" He breathed out.

Steve patted his pockets, eyes going wide in panic. "Fuck, *fuck* - I dont have it." He thought for a moment, face going sour.

A firework streaked past, lit before it crashed into the beast's arm, exploding in bright orange.

"It's in Scoops I bet... on the backroom floor."

Billy was in no place to run down those stairs, past a monster, into

Scoops and back up to Steve. He would have passed out probably walking to the stairs or standing up.
And Steve obviously was not going anywhere.

They were stuck on the sidelines.

“Shit... where’s El? And Grigori?”

The two leaned over further to the railing, looking around the second floor too as more and more fireworks exploded.

No El, No Grigori on the second floor. Their eyes drifted to the stores, searching and searching until.

“Hawkins Heroes - right there.” Steve’s hand shot out, index finger outstretched.

Billy’s heart collapsed inwards for a moment.

El, kicking and fighting in the man’s arms. His face was fixed into a snarl, a firework crashing. He twitched, arm falling down as he tried to keep moving. El slipped a little, trying to get out, him only grabbing her up more before his back gave a hunk forward, Mindflayer screaming as pink exploded in a sparkling blaze along its body.

He was feeling every blow the flayer felt, slowing him down.

Billy got a glimmer of hope, watching as another firework hit and Grigori looked like he got punched in the mouth, arms giving out. Eleven dropped, falling to his feet and rolling, scampering on the floor. Free - and Grigori was trying to grab her again, but mostly failing as fireworks came down on his controller.

“WE’RE RUNNING OUT!” Mike screamed suddenly in between a beastly Mindflayer roar, a cry of alarm and a plea for help. The others around the balcony shot up, yelling incoherent sentences. Billy and Steve were left useless, too beaten up by Grigori to do a thing. They sat and watched.

Billy looked over at Steve, head pressed against the bars of the second floor railing. His broken legs were still splayed out wrong, a sad smile on his face as he watched the kids trying to fight.

“We’re never gonna win.” He whispered out, those big brown eyes staring down in despair at the Mindflayer’s flesh mass.

Pyrotechnics continued to crash around them, detonating on the creature, slowing it down as Grigori screamed with it, thrashing about as El tried to scurry away.

“What?” Billy choked out, confused. Steve just sighed, shaking his head. Yeah, maybe they were running out of fireworks but - Joyce and Hopper! And their friend! And El was out of Grigori’s clutches, and it was all seeming to be going fine enough? What the fuck did he mean?

“This... thing. We fight, and we fight it... and it always comes back.” He breathed in, gunpowder and the burning flesh smell filling his lungs.

Oh.

Now Billy was getting it.

“Yeah, we’re winning now but... Maybe we’re just supposed to stop fighting?”

Even if now he understood, he didn’t like what Steve was insinuating though.

“Hey!” The blonde frowned, looking down at El quickly, Grigori thrashing about. The Mindflayer screamed in pain.

Around the other sides of the second floor, Robin, Max, and Nancy were throwing fireworks. Jonathan and Will were over on the other side, and Lucas and Mike were rocketing another off one adjacent to them.

He turned back to Steve. “Don’t - Why are you even saying that? That’s a shit outlook.”

“I dunno. This just never stops - every year I get a black eye, I’m littered with bruises. This time my legs are broken like fucking twigs, *and now you’re dragged in and* -” His words rushed before he took a sharp inhale. “I know I’m being a Debbie Downer but god - I feel like we’re delaying the inevitable Billy. What’s even the point? Why should we even keep fighting?”

Billy spat out his first answer.

“I want to keep fighting because I want to stay with you!”

It was harsh in tone, spat out like an insult almost. There was a ‘*what the fuck Steve?!*’ ring to it, eyebrows brought together in that bewildered face. The words weren’t a direct admission to Billy’s affections, no. But they were enough for one Steven Joseph Harrington to get the picture. Steve’s not just a new friend who Billy wants to keep for life - the way he said it means more than friends, a deeper bond that takes a similar but different path.

It’s a huge leap from what they were hours ago, which was weird, sort of homoerotic enemies.

Still, despite understanding what Billy’s saying - it’s like getting hit by a tentacle of the beast, knocking Steve’s breath away.

“...What?” He breathed out, disoriented, knocked off his stable platform by Billy’s words.

“Don’t you... hate me? Wha...” His mouth fell open as Billy’s went into a pout. The blonde’s gaze cast childishly downwards, ashamed of himself as he began to close off again. Folding one bulky arm over himself, then the other.

As Billy’s trying to close himself off though, Steve’s hand reached up past his folded arms, coming to cup the other’s cheek.

“Billy....”

“I like you Steve. A lot. And I don’t want to give up, to tell them to call it all off and surrender, because I want to...” His words caught in his throat. Steve finished them for him.

“You want to stay with me.” A smile was emerging on Steve's slowly closing mouth.

“Yeah, I want to stay with you.” Billy laughed out in relief. God, he felt stupid but so good at the same time.

“Me too.”

An admission right back. Billy's heart soared up into his chest - he wasn't alone.

His feelings had a fighting chance.

Steve's hand trailed down the other's neck in a wordless motion, traveling to the headphones.

“If this is it, even if we're winning right now, *just in case* - I wanna stay with you here. We can pretend we got to stay together for years and years after this.” He scooted closer, coming right up to press into the blonde.

“What song d'you have on this piece of shit?”

Billy unhooked the headphones from his neck, turning them upside down, allowing Steve to lean on him, coming in to put his ear to the upturned speaker pad.

Billy pressed play.

“When I'm not with you

Think of me always

Love you, love you”

Fireworks popped behind them as they pressed their backs into the cool metal of the railing, eyes falling hooded as sparkling bursts of pink, blue, and red illuminated them. The music played, so quiet against the screams of Jumbo July Launchers, Satan's Baby's, and

Mega Xtreme Rockets soaring and exploding. The song was barely audible but they focused in on it, making a miniature heaven out of the moments they had left.

The Beast screamed, rearing up in agony.

Billy turned and just smiled, Steve returning it. The music picked up as the fireworks rained down in hellfire.

“Hey, boy, where do you get it from?

Hey, boy, where did you go?

I learned my passion

In the good old-fashioned

School of loverboys”

El was still crawling away, Grigori continuing to flail about. The monster was inside him, and every hit it took was hitting Grigori right back. He twitched and jumped out of his skin, screaming in pain with the monster as a firework exploded in its mouth.

It was looking hopeful - maybe they could win. Maybe this was it.

El was going fast now, eyes still scared but determined as she made her way into Scoops, escaping hopefully. The others launching their fireworks were cheering for her, tuned out to Billy and Steve by Queen and the volume of everything else happening around them.

“Dining at the Ritz we'll meet at nine precisely (One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine o'clock)

I will pay the bill, you taste the wine

Driving back in style in my saloon will do quite nicely

Just take me back to yours that will be fine (Come on and get it)”

The fireworks were still hailing down, the two boys left to listen to it all as the music continued to play into their ears.

Billy curiously opened an eye, shifting from Steve's calm face to the balcony around them.

And then Billy saw it.

Mike and Lucas, the duo from hell - holding up the biggest fucking firework he had ever seen.

It *HAD* to be extremely illegal, more of a weapon of mass destruction than a fun 4th of July toy. He could feel the tensity as Lucas heaved it up, setting its rest on the bars of the railing, Mike dragging a display mannequin from the women's clothing store behind them to hold it up.

Lucas flicked a lighter, Mike plugging his ears.

"Get down!" Billy hissed at Steve, the song ending as he grabbed onto his companion, pulling him into his chest and curling inwards. Steve babbled something but it was cut off by a deafening noise.

There was an explosion, and the entire mall lit up in sudden white hot blazing glory, firework sailing forward, Mike and Lucas tumbling back as it flew.

It ran through the mall like an airstrike missile, dedicated to its sole target.

The bright light went dim for seconds as it moved forward and forward, the Mindflayer turning to look at the projectile. All was silent for a moment.

Then, the atom bomb hit.

The Mindflayer's jaws opened up to try to scream upon the miniature missile's impact, but nothing came out. It was cut short as everything lit up in technicolor, and the overly powerful firework tore through it with a deafening cry.

Rainbow light streaked out in all directions, like lightning had touched down and a huge light bulb turned on, illuminating the food court in a hot rain of colored sparks. They flew everywhere, filling up the enclosed space with all of their glory, sprinkling down all over the floors, restaurants, and chairs.

Billy's good eye was left wide open, mesmerized, too drawn in at the prettiness of it all to miss it.

He watched as Steve's flabbergasted face scrunched up for a single moment, turned just right towards him become lit up in the most beautiful way.

Those brown eyes staring right back at him in confusion, mouth slack jawed and left hanging open. The bruises were bright now, littered all over him in lumps of dark plum and coal. Red and orange filled in to backlight his hair, purples around his neck. Yellow in his forehead, greens and blues in his cheeks.

Steve, for an unforgettable moment, became colored in full by a devastatingly destructive but magnificent rainbow, where the silence loud enough to allow Billy to hear the next song playing on the walkman.

The light died though, there for one second and gone the next. The sound of dying power rang out (probably from the explosion), followed by the disgusting music of fat, thick black blooded, juicy meat chunks hailing down.

"Shlaap!", As the body parts hit new mall plaster, the sound of liquid spraying out as the flesh compressed, and blood splattered outwards.

A chunk flew over the beaten up duo's heads, a messy hunk of someone's melted and distorted leg (only identifiable by the toes still sticking out) flying out and smacking into the Kinney shoes sign they

faced. Their eyes went wide as moonpies, watching the flesh hit the unlit sign like a wadded up spit ball on a blackboard. Spittle blood sprayed out, the leg piece sticking for a moment before it began to slide down.

Billy cringed internally at the grossness of it.

“Holy fuck.” Steve gasped, breaking the silence.

The sounds of cheering broke the rest of it, the generators of the mall chiming in too. Lights (or well - the ones not shattered by the Mindflayer pre and post explosion) flickered back on, Neon signs joining in. The Kinney sign sparked up, formerly white lettering now speckled and painted gooey black.

The boys turned, looking over their shoulders and down at the ground floor to see the mess.

The Mindflayer’s hellbeast laid in pieces, steaming and bubbling, black blood leaking out across the tiles. The body of it was in pieces strewn across the floor, mixed in with a well... very much bleeding Grigori.

Billy’s first assumption, staring in bewilderment at the corpse of the hulking man, was that the Mindflayer blowing up meant that.... god... he blew up internally as well.

The thought of the Russian’s internally exploded guts sent a shiver of fear through his body.

Thank god that wasn’t him.

“STEVE! WE DID IT MAN!”

Curly (Wasn’t he supposed to be on the hill?) was shouting across the way, Billy tilting his head further into the rail to see. The kid came bounding towards them with open arms.

Billy instinctively came away from the metal barrier and draped an appendage over Steve like a protective blanket. The kid skipped over, smiling with those incoming pearls.

“Aren’t you going to get up and-”

His mouth fell open pointing at Steve’s legs cluelessly.

“Your l-”

“His fuckin’ legs.” Billy interjected with furious spit fire. “His legs are broken as shit, and I got hit by the dead human semi truck. *Neither* of us are getting up anytime soon.” He finished, scowl across his face. Steve groaned and batted at him, pushing him back into the railing

with a weak hand.

“Shut up you two, my head hurts.” He bitched, leaning into the cool steel of the railings bars. Billy complied, Dustin following.

“What's up with-” Lucas started, cut off by a harsh *SHHHHH* of Henderson and Hargrove. Billy's eyes rolled as Lucas observed the situation, Steve slumping on the blonde's shoulder.

“I'll get Robin.” He spat out quickly, followed by rapid footsteps in the other direction. Billy's eyes fell closed, exhaling, and then inhaling the scent of Steve's hairspray.

He smirked as he recognized it as Farrah Fawcett, his mind falling dark as he passed out again.

When Billy awoke again, he was staring up into the face of a military man.

“Son, you alright? Now tell me what you saw.”

Billy blinked, looking around. His head spun like a penny, going round and round for loops of endless daze.

Police Chief Hopper raised an eyebrow at him, Joyce Byers standing beside him with a concerned look on her face. Billy was sat on an ambulance bed, propped up so he could sit upright. There were ambulances and firetrucks filling the parking lot like it was a meetup of sorts, people bringing out caution tape and everything of the sort. The lights made his head feel like it was overloaded, eyes squinting in an attempt to shutter it out.

“You don't have to lie.” Joyce said, adding a “They know.”

So Billy told the military man everything he knew, still confused on how he had come to, sitting upright in an ambulance, apparently already talking. He figured Grigori jostled his brain a little too hard - he'd have to try to figure out a way to go to the doctor or something.

He finished up his story, wrapping it up in a tight little bow of passing out against the railing. The military man, Lt. Kennedy, as his name plate read, jotted it down.

“I’ll be back to check on you during your work hours. Lisa will be over with paperwork you need to sign. Other specifics of payment can be discussed later.”

Payment?

Billy blinked, opened his mouth to ask, but the Lieutenant was already walking away. He shut it, eyes looking back up to Joyce and The Chief for guidance.

“I’ll drive you home, okay? Not a word of any of this to your parents, the military will speak to them. You just listen to whatever government people say for a little while, keep it under wraps.” She said softly, Hopper looking expectantly at him.

Billy nodded, the motion making him feel queasy.

“Alright. Me & Jim will leave you two be.”

You two?

The pair (who he now was suspecting were more of a couple, with how close Joyce and Hopper stood to each other) walked off, leaving Billy to slowly shift himself to his right to see his other half.

To his delight, a sleepy looking Steve looked up at him, head resting on the pillow with his swollen but now correct looking legs splayed out in a matching pair of casts. They tilted upwards, elevated by slings.

He snickered at the red bandaging of the casts, thinking of Steve’s car. Red must’ve been his favorite color.

“Hey *Pretty boy* ~” Billy purred, settling into his own pillow. “How’s it hanging?”

Steve rolled his eyes, shooting a smirk over.

“It’s hangin’ Hargrove. How’s the head?”

“I feel like I got punched by a fuckin’ rhino.”

Steve let out a low laugh, teeth flashing from across the ambulance aisle. Billy wondered how the hell they got here or how they even carried Steve down those never ending stairs. “Good to know - glad it wasn’t an elephant.”

Billy's lips settled into a smile, eyes going hooded as silence settled over the pair.

"Sooooo—" Steve interjected, not very good with being quiet when something was on his mind. Billy didn't mind - truthfully he liked Steve's voice filling the quiet most of the time. It was bubbly, sometimes annoying, yeah - but it was Steve.

And well it had been already established that he liked Steve.

"Yes?" Billy asked, opening himself for questions. Steve spat it out.
"Did you really mean what you said, up on the balcony?"

Billy did.

He meant it and so much more.

He wanted to stay with Steve till the end of times, no matter how far or soon they were. He wanted to figure it out, try again.

He nodded.

"Well, if we got to stay together - what'd you do?"

Before Steve could say another word, he just went off rambling.

"Sometimes, at night or in the parking lot, I'll listen to Queen's Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy, and I'll dream about—" Falling in love with you, "-staying with you, and trying again, and like.. The stupidest, cheesiest stuff.

"I'm not good at fancy stuff but god, If I had the money I would've taken you up to Fort Wayne Zoo or that stupid Enzo's place Tina Buchemy in our Chem class always talked about. Or like - even just simple stuff. Like holding hands in the grocery store, or," He drew in a breath before continuing. "Or that stupid sap shit where I'd have a pocket sized calendar to mark down every anniversary and birthday and holiday or day you have off to do something special. God it's so fucking horribly sentimental that it makes me want to gag but -" He shook his head, lips falling into a frown. "You make me want it. Really bad. And - I never hated you, I was just.. Scared. Really, really

scared.

And I... I want you to know all of that. That's what I'd do if I got to try again, and like... stay with you."

Steve went silent. Looked at him with big eyes, trying to read if he was joking. There was nothing but sincerity, a small frown and gentle upward brows on Billy's face.

Steve's head tilted, a wonky smile coming across his face.

"You for real?" He uttered out, a dopey looking smile spreading across his face like someone was buttering it on.

"Yeah, I'm for real." He laughed, settling into himself a bit. "We just fought a fucking Russian super soldier and some End Of Times Ass creature from wherever the fuck - this is *way* more plausible to be real than any of that."

Steve just grinned, those straight teeth flashing as they moved in from across the aisle, coming close to him. He lifted into the air, ass coming off the cot, hands going to the locked cot that Billy sat in. He leaned over with his torso above air, relying on his hands and the cot's stability to hold him aloft.

And then suddenly he was being kissed, and the world paused for another second. A surge of electricity ran through him as Steve kissed hard, hand wrapping up into his hair and pulling him impossibly closer.

Steve smelled like sweat, coconut shampoo, and Farrah Fawcett - Billy wouldn't have had it any other way.

Steve broke away only after a moment, hand staying up in Billy's hair. He teetered a little, only one hand left to stay stable.

"I do that too. I think about so much stupid shit - like making you dinner?" He paused, letting out a snort. "God, it's so domestic, I figured you would have hated it. But like dancing around in our underwear, just singing the song. Or y'know those late night calls, where they started at 8 PM and by the time you're hanging up the suns rising and you can feel the heaviness of sleep in your chest."

He looked up with hope.

"I wanted, and still want that with you. All of it."

Billy blinked in confusion.

“Wait what.”

That didn’t make sense.

“Singing the song? You-”

“Yeah.” Steve cut him off, coming closer again like he was gonna kiss Billy for another time.

“Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy comes on, and I think of you and that ‘cheesy’ domestic stuff.” His grin was cheshire, wonky and all stupidly lovey as he admitted it all up.

This time Billy initiated the kiss.

Steve wiggled and wobbled, Billy’s hand catching him up as his broad legs came to move off the cot.

“Mmph, Steve, ” He muttered in between their lips, Steve giving a questioning “Mm?” back.

“You’re- mphm- falling- lemme get you-” Billy placed his boots to the floor of the vehicle, hands gripping the other and pushing him back to his cot.

“I’ll come over-” Steve cut him off with another kiss, hands coming off the bars and into Billy’s hair. “-there.”

Steve kept pressing on the kisses, the blonde going right with them as he kneeled down at his side.

Steve shifted past his lips, dragging down into the other’s ear.

“Your walkmans playing our song again.” He cooed, hand reaching around Billy’s neck to lift up the headphones to his ear. Freddie Mercury flooded in, mixing in with Steve’s lips peppering up his cheek and back to their home on his.

“ Ooh, love (There he goes again)

(He's my good old fashioned loverboy) Ooh, loverboy

What're you doin' tonight, hey, boy?

Everything's all right

Just hold on tight”

“That's because I'm a good old-fashioned (fashioned),”

Steve leaned in close, breathing words into his mouth.

“Stay with me forever.”

“Yes.” Billy breathed back.

“*Loverboy.*” Freddie finished.

2. Epilogue

Summary for the Chapter:

1 year later, after all of the shenanigans of Starcourt.

It's exactly one year later.

“Billy?” Steve called.

The dish towel on the taller man's shoulder sat heavy, weighing down despite not even being a pound. He had dreaded the day he'd become a mom archetype who casually wore one around the kitchen like a scarf, but here he was - doing just that.

There's silence from the other. The hot dogs on their stove pan sizzled, soft meat cooking up nicely. Steve poked his tongs at one, rolling it over while he waited for a response.

The meat was cooking well, already becoming darker.
No response though.

“*Billy.*” He tried again.
Waiting.

Only silence and tuning static answered.

Steve huffed and turned himself around to face the other guy, scowl setting over his lips, brows drooping down. Billy stood unmoving, hunched over the opposite counter, ignoring him.

“*Hey, Loverboy -*”

The dish towel's weight came off his shoulder, flicking quick before it went sailing through the air. The colorful rag only was in the air for mere seconds before it found its home, wacking into the side of the

blonde's head. Billy released an 'oof', his hands flying up to get it off his curls.

"Get your ass over here to help with these hot dogs."

Billy smacked the towel to the ground, looking up from his radio to finally respond with a stuck out tongue.

"Fuck the hot dogs - *I'll give you a hot dog.*" A hint of playfulness undercoated his words, a tiny glimmering smirk appearing over his lips. It was something him and Steve shared well - a bitchy tone with an underbelly of genuine affection and teasing.

Steve gagged at him.

"Gross. Like anyone wants to touch *that* weiner."

"I dunno, you weren't complaining when I got home ye-"

Another dishtowel (Steve had them fucking EVERYWHERE) appeared and was promptly thrown at him. A silent 'hush it'.

Billy obliged.

Steve and Billy had been living together for almost 9 months now. Turns out the payment Mr. Military, Lt. Whatever The Hell His Name Was, had been talking about was a hefty government hush money check. \$3000 each month, delivered directly to one William D. Hargrove in an official stamped manila folder.

It was enough money to get Billy something he desperately wanted - his own living situation, originally preferred to be somewhere in California until later complications arose, but *FAR* away from Neil.

It wasn't like he had much of a choice though on whether he was

going to keep living in the Hargrove Mayfield household - he promptly was kicked out of the house the minute he got home from Starcourt (Joyce politely drove them and Steve home, the Camaro towed away by the Cavalry for evidence, and Billy didn't *dare* drive that truck home).

There was a lot of screaming, Neil yelling about where the hell the cars were, What Billy was doing with *impressionable, young Maxine*, Why he looked like he got his ass beat, Why was Maxine a mess, Who in the hell was in his passenger seat, and Who was driving the truck. Billy provided no answers, just infuriating silence.

Neil would punch and kick the boys ribs all he wanted - nothing came out. Once he gave in, he just kicked his only biological child to the curb.

“If you aren’t going to give answers, I won’t be giving you a place to stay.”

Billy was left on the doorstep like a discarded box, groaning. Neil and Gregori injuries weren’t a good combination. Steve and Joyce waited outside the entire time. They probably heard the yelling & figured they should stay.

“Want a ride to Steve’s place dear?”

“Sure.”

From there they lived in the lavish but hauntingly empty Harrington house for a while, Billy collecting up on his monthly government checks + any money he made from the pool. It added up quickly (after a portion went to repairing the returned but still well damaged

camaro) and they put down a deposit 3 months in.

And now they were here.

One year after Starcourt, In the kitchen of their cute pale blue house, on the 4th of July, in their t-shirts and underwear. Cooking hotdogs to prepare to go sit outside on their back porch and watch the neighbor's fireworks.

A familiar note began to carry over the radio as Billy went back to fiddle with it, his signature cat-like grin bleeding out all over his face. “Is that...?” Steve started, turning around from the hot dog’s he was cooking on the stove. Steve insisted they tasted better that way - Billy didn’t give a shit. Hot dogs were hot dogs.

“Mhmmm~” Billy nodded, heels planting into the ground as he spun on them to face the other, arms opening wide.

“*I can dim the lights and sing you songs full of sad things,* ” He sang out, walking towards his apron wearing boyfriend. Why did hot dogs need an apron? Who the fuck knows.

Steve beamed back, lips puckering up to offer kisses as those strong arms came around him, pulling close. “*We can do the tango just for two~* ” Billy whispered, gladly taking up the others’ invitation for affection. Steve’s lips moved as Billy pressed his in, singing out the lyrics into his mouth.

“*I can serenade and gently play on your heart strings,*

Be your Valentino just for you.”

Hands came together in a practiced motion as the music picked up, arms raising into the air to the point where it left Billy reaching on tiptoes.

“*Ooh, love,* ” Freddie Mercury canted, the happy couple joining in as Steve twisted, rolling out of his love’s arms but staying connected at a hand.

“*Ooh, loverboy-*”

“*What're you doin' tonight, hey, boy!* ” Billy called out, an ear to ear smile plastered on in glee.

“*Set my alarm-* ” Steve sang, taking a step forward.

“*-Turn on my charm.* ” Billy answered, foot moving to take a step as well.

“*That's because I'm a good old-fashioned loverboy~*” Steve couldn’t help but give a little shimmy to the piano keys downstepping at the end, Billy laughing as they continued to dance across their tile floor, hotdogs sizzling in the background.

“*Ooh, let me feel your heartbeat (Grow faster, faster)* ” Mercury called, Billy’s free hand trailing up Steve’s bicep and down his chest to poke at his heart, prodding out the ‘faster, faster’.

Steve knew well where the song was going, his hand reaching out and grabbing the stove’s burner dial to turn it off - just in case they got... caught up.

“*Ooh, ooh, can you feel my love heat?*” Billy’s hands went down farther and farther, finding themselves at hips before the tone of the singer dropped down.

“Come on and sit on my hot-seat of love” His face must've looked stupid, puffed out and pouty as he mouthed the words and grabbed at cloth, pulling Steve by the apron to press into right him.

“And tell me how do you feel right after all.”

Steve gasped, eyebrows striking up into his hairline at the cheeky new addition. Billy had been thinking it up for weeks now, waiting for the song to come back on and the perfect opportunity.

“I’d like for you and I to go romancing,” Billy droned out, leaning forwards into the other's personal bubble.

Steve responded by leaning back, not yet ready to let him have it. Not after a little stunt like that one.

“Say the word, your wish is my command.”

“Ooh, love, ooh, loverboy”

Steve let go entirely now, hands swatting Billy's off and away. The brunette stepped away, back farther and farther across the kitchen, tan walls lit by the tag sale light they found. A calendar with a rooster on a haybale (Claudia Henderson's....creative housewarming gift) stared down at Steve from the wall as he backed up to it, the pair's fridge magnets (one from Fort Wayne Zoo, a 'Karaoke King' magnet, a Farrah Fawcett magnet, and even one from Lake Michigan) glimmering as the guy passed and pressed himself flush to plaster.

“What’re you doin’ tonight, hey, boy? ” Steven snatched up a list from the fridge, which *was* the grocery and chores itinerary for the week.

“Write my letter,” He promptly snatched up a pen from the jar atop the wall adjacent fridge, popping it's cap off with his mouth and quickly scribbling.

“Feel much better,”

He slid the pen into the crook of his ear, flipping the paper for Billy to see.

“And use my fancy patter on the telephone.”

A big old middle finger.

Sloppy as ever.

A humble, fun loving form of “fuck you, dickwad” for Billy’s shameless moves.

Billy bolted at him for a revenge tackle, but the music's sudden downward pace change to adagio and Steve's motherly finger that shot up to wag a ‘tsk, tsk, tsk’ made him slow. He glowered and walked over instead, hands filtering into Steve’s with ease. He took up the paper note, crumpling it up before tossing it aside. His fingers secured themselves within Steve’s gloating hands, a firm pout securing his lower lip.

“When I’m not with you

Think of you always

(I miss those long hot summer nights) I miss you

When I’m not with you

Think of me always-” The pair sang, swaying together as they moved through the lyrics, getting ready for the song to become more lively. Billy leaned forward, teeth biting the words out.

“*Love you,*” He sang like it was a childish challenge through adorable words, trying to see if the other would accept.

Steve was utterly bashful at seeing the other so fussy and getting riled up.

“Love you.”

He accepted - he knew damn well what Billy wanted. It was what he always wanted when they danced to this part of the song.

He wanted to lead. *Badly.* Steve fought him ravenously for it. Mainly just because it was funny to see Billy having to follow after him, huffing and puffing the entire time.

But as per usual, Billy wanted the upper hand, and with the song about to shove it into high gear?
The two would be dueling for dominance.

“Hey, boy, where do you get it from?

Hey, boy, where did you go?”

The movement went from swaying to spinning, the pair shoving their hands together tighter, bodies coming close as they moved in a circle, trying to find a leader.

Billy pressed hard for the next move, and Steve butted his head right back.

“I learned my passion-”

Billy jerked Steve forward, the other stumbling into his chest. The brunette blinked in surprise, glare coming into his eyes.

“In the good old-fashioned-”

Harrington tugged backwards, this time Billy being pulled along, thighs brushing into the others as they fell into one another.

They stayed upwards though, California boy reaminging balanced.

“School of loverboys.”

“Oh, it’s so on, Harrington.” Billy growled, nipping at Steve’s jawline. Steve dodged, sticking his tongue out.

“Come and get it, Hargrove.”

The guitar played out, the pair continuing their little playfight. There were pushes and shoves, biting and even spitting too. All of it was in good fun as they danced around, one tugging on the other before the recipient gave the giver the treatment back.

No victor was clear yet.

“Dining at the Ritz we’ll meet at nine precisely (One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine o’clock)

I will pay the bill, you taste the wine.”

Billy found himself matching feet with Steve, pairing his foot with the others opposite, stepping in and out in rhythm. It worked well, a collaborative effort where for a moment they didn't try to one up their partner.

“Driving back in style in my saloon will do quite nicely

Just take me back to yours that will be fine (Come on and get it).”

The moment didn't last though. The blonde of course soiled it though by sneaking in a devilish kiss on the throat, the taller man smacking him and pushing him off.

“Ooh, love (There he goes again)”

Steve grabbed his boyfriend's hand with sudden force, hand smacking onto his ass. A sure way to surprise him and win.

“(He's my good old fashioned loverboy) Ooh, loverboy”

What Steve didn't realize was Billy was planning on doing the same thing.

At the same time.

There was a cohesive slap.

“What're you doin' tonight, hey, boy?”

And a paired shout.

“Everything's all right”

And a loud, loud crashing thud.

“Just hold on tight”

A moment of silence as the couple looked at each other, eyes both wide and stupefied.

“That's because I'm a good old-fashioned (fashioned) loverboy.”

And then laughter.

“Oh my god-” Billy started, Steve snorting. The noise made Billy's giggles perk right up, spluttering and bending over to laugh.

“We really just-” Steve tried to continue, taking in their position, more laughter bubbling in his throat.

They'd fallen down, still in their underwear, to the kitchen floor. The same time ass grabbing made them both jump and well... with neither of them was there to catch each other, they both went tumbling down.

Billy let out another long series of giggles, Steve's head tipping down to look at the other who was buried into his knees, finger prodding at him to look back up.

“You're such an ass Billy.” He grinned, Billy snicker even more. Blue eyes peaked upwards, a sandy blonde mop framing picture perfect teeth.

“Eat my shorts, pretty-loverboy.”

Steve snorted again and fell over in a fit of laughter. Billy joined right in, flopping over to join his good old fashioned lover boy in getting punched by laughter.

One year and some change later after the Byers House fight, their first *official* fight, Billy and Steve have now fought numerous times. Just now, they end in laughter and kisses.

It's much better this way.